

**VHA FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM**

- 1. PURPOSE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides guidance for the provision of temporary lodging in Fisher Houses. Lodging in Fisher Houses may be provided to family members of hospitalized veterans. Veterans receiving outpatient VA medical care may be lodged in Fisher Houses with their families.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This Handbook is a new issuance defining the VHA Fisher House Program.
- 3. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VHA Directive 1110 (to be published).
- 4. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:** The Office of Social Work Service (110B) is responsible for the content of this Directive. Questions may be referred to the Director, Social Work Service at 202-273-8549.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Handbook is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of April 2008.

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Under Secretary for Health

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## VHA FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook provides guidance for the provision of temporary lodging in Fisher Houses. Lodging in Fisher Houses may be provided to family members of hospitalized veterans. Veterans receiving outpatient Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care may be lodged in Fisher Houses with their families.

### 2. FISHER HOUSE FOUNDATION BACKGROUND

a. The Fisher House Foundation, a Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, was created in 1990 by Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher. The Foundation constructs and donates Fisher Houses to the Department of Defense (DOD) and VA for use by families of patients hospitalized in military and VA hospitals. DOD Secretaries and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Fisher Houses once they are donated by the Fishers. There are thirty Fisher Houses located on sixteen military bases and at six VA medical centers. Each House is professionally decorated and furnished and has a common kitchen, laundry facility, dining room and living room.

b. Section 221(a) of the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419) gave VA legislative authority to accept Fisher Houses constructed and donated by the Fisher House Foundation and to use appropriated funds to operate and maintain Fisher Houses. These statutory provisions regarding Fisher Houses have been codified at 38 U.S.C. 1708, and are administered VHA. **NOTE:** *Federal Regulations on Fisher Houses and other forms of temporary lodging were published February 24, 2003, in the Federal Register.*

c. The Fisher House Foundation has committed to constructing one new VA Fisher House each year. The Fisher House Foundation requires that all Fisher Houses be used to provide temporary lodging to veterans and their family members or caregivers who require lodging accommodations as part of receiving health care from VHA or DOD.

d. Fisher Houses average 5600 square feet, and are designed to fit aesthetically in their proposed neighborhood surroundings.

e. The total construction costs average \$600,000 to \$700,000 (estimated in year 2000 dollars).

f. Financial support from the VHA facility (fund-raising of donations from local sponsors, endorsements, etc.) for construction costs will favor selection of a site for construction.

**NOTE:** *Once the Fisher House Foundation has selected a site and breaks ground, construction usually takes 6 to 8 months.*

### 3. SCOPE

a. The VA Fisher House Program is coordinated by the VHA Director, Social Work Service. Coordination includes oversight of the operation of all VA Fisher Houses, regular communication with Fisher House managers, and liaison with the Fisher House Foundation.

b. VHA has developed a selection process and criteria for new VA Fisher Houses (see par.9). Periodically, the Office of the Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) solicits applications from VHA facilities, through Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) offices, for new Fisher Houses.

c. Once the Fisher House Foundation donates a Fisher House to VA, the VHA facility is responsible for operation and maintenance of the House. Funding of operation and maintenance is to be a line item in the facility budget. Centralized funding will be established by VA Central Office for major costs of refurbishing and redecorating Fisher Houses and for replacing major appliances.

d. Each VA Fisher House will be staffed with a full time Fisher House Manager who has an office located in the Fisher House. The Fisher House Manager oversees daily operation, including accepting applications for lodging, arranging for lodging stays, orientation of Fisher House guests, tracking utilization, budgeting and tracking costs, preparing reports for the VHA Fisher House Program and for the Fisher House Foundation, and supervising employees, volunteers and students working in the Fisher House.

e. VHA facilities with Fisher Houses are encouraged to work through Voluntary Service in requesting donations from community and veterans' groups for such things as comfort items, non-perishable food items, linens, and house wares to support the Fisher House. *NOTE: Use of volunteers to help staff Fisher Houses is strongly encouraged.*

### 4. ELIGIBILITY FOR FISHER HOUSES

Fisher Houses are designed for use by family members of hospitalized veterans. However, veterans undergoing outpatient treatment who do not live within commuting distance of the VHA facility may be accommodated at Fisher Houses along with their family members.

### 5. PROVISION OF FISHER HOUSE SERVICES

a. Accommodation in a Fisher House is on a first-come, first-served basis.

b. No fees may be charged to veterans or their family members for lodging in Fisher Houses. However, the VHA facility may accept donations.

### 6. APPLICATION FOR FISHER HOUSES

The family member of a hospitalized veteran or the veteran must apply to the facility's Fisher House Manager for lodging in a Fisher House. This may be done by letter, electronic means (including telephone, e-mail, or facsimile), or in person. Facility staff may use paper or

electronic consults to refer a veteran's family to the Fisher House. The family member or veteran must provide the:

(1) Veteran's name, Social Security Number and where the veteran is being treated (e.g., inpatient medical unit, intensive care unit, etc.).

(2) Name, gender, age (if under 18) and relationship to veteran of all family members requesting lodging in the Fisher House.

(3) Requested date(s) for lodging in the Fisher House.

(4) Distance, time, and means of travel from the family's home to the VA healthcare facility.

## 7. CRITERIA FOR LODGING IN A FISHER HOUSE

In order to receive lodging in a Fisher House, the family member and veteran (if also staying at the Fisher House) must:

a. Be medically stable and capable of self-care or be accompanied by a caregiver able to provide the necessary care. VA does not provide nursing or other medical care in Fisher Houses.

b. Be required to travel either 50 or more miles or at least two hours from their home to the VA health care facility. The facility Director may make an exception to distance or time provisions based on exceptional circumstances, such as inclement weather, road conditions, or the mode of transportation used. The facility Director may authorize the Fisher House Manager to make decisions on exceptions.

c. Be able to stay in an unsupervised setting.

d. Decisions concerning Fisher House lodging are to be made by the facility's Fisher House Manager. If space is unavailable, referrals for temporary lodging may be made to the Fisher House manager or to the veteran's social worker.

## 8. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Facility Director.** The facility Director is responsible for:

(1) Providing lodging in the facility's Fisher House as space and funding allow.

(2) Oversight, operation, and maintenance of the Fisher House.

(3) Staffing the Fisher House with a full time manager.

(4) Routine upkeep of the Fisher House, including 24-hour availability for repairs and housekeeping.

(5) Funding daily operation costs of the Fisher House.

b. **Fisher House Managers.** Fisher House Managers are responsible for:

(1) Managing and operating the Fisher House in a fiscally responsible manner, ensuring the needs of Fisher House guests are met.

(2) Ensuring the Fisher House is safe, clean and free from hazards, including adequate housekeeping and maintenance of the facility.

(3) Ensuring family members lodged in Fisher Houses receive orientation to the House, including fire and safety information and whom to call in an emergency.

(c) Completing reports on costs, utilization, and operation of the Fisher House to the Fisher House Foundation and to the VA Fisher House Program Coordinator in a timely manner.

c. **Family Members.** Family members are responsible for abiding by the rules for the Fisher House and all facility rules and policies. They must sign a statement of understanding regarding the fact that:

(1) No medical or nursing services will be provided in the Fisher House.

(2) No one with a communicable disease may be lodged in a Fisher House.

(3) No overnight guests are allowed in Fisher Houses unless approved by the Fisher House manager.

(4) Children must be supervised at all times.

(5) No pets, with the exception of service dogs, are allowed in Fisher Houses;

(6) No alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs are allowed on VA grounds.

(7) No weapons or explosives may be brought onto VA grounds.

(8) Gambling is prohibited on VA grounds.

(9) Soliciting, vending and selling merchandise are prohibited on VA grounds.

(10) Sexual misconduct, destroying property, and creating a disturbance are prohibited on VA grounds.

(11) Smoking is not allowed in Fisher Houses. ***NOTE: Guests must use designated smoking areas.***

(12) Failure to abide by the facility's rules may result in being required to leave the Fisher House.

## 9. FISHER HOUSE CRITERIA

VHA has developed criteria for the selection of new VHA Fisher Houses. Periodically, VHA solicits applications from VHA facilities through the VISN offices. VHA then applies the selection criteria to the applications received and prioritizes them, providing the Fisher House Foundation with a list of proposed sites for new VA Fisher Houses. The final determination for new sites is made by the Fisher House Foundation.

### a. Information Considered in VHA Fisher House Selection Process

(1) Availability of vacant land on which to build, preferably about 1 acre. *NOTE: Site preparation is the responsibility of the VHA facility.*

(2) A full description of the proposed location, including size of lot and location in relation to the VHA facility and the approximate walking time from the proposed site to patient treatment buildings. . *NOTE: Ideally, the proposed site is be easily accessible to patient treatment buildings.*

(3) A statement of commitment to provide for the operational costs, including all utilities and maintenance of the structure and utilities is required from facility.

(4) A statement of commitment to provide one Full-time equivalent (FTE) employee to supervise the facility (the Fisher House Manager).

(5) A brief statement describing patient treatment programs offered at the VHA facility that are expected to be the primary sources of patients supported by the Fisher House. Include workload information (number of unique veterans, number of outpatient visits, and the number of inpatient admissions, etc.).

(6) Identify any special construction issues or needs for the proposed site.

(7) Provide any other significant information that would assist VHA in the site selection process.

(8) Provide letters of endorsement from veterans' service organizations and the Chief of Voluntary Service.

(9) Provide letters of endorsement from community leaders and State and Federal politicians.

(10) Describe any state grants or local financial and/or volunteer support for initial funding, as well as for continued operational support.

(11) The application must include signature approvals of the facility and VISN directors.

## 10. VHA GUIDANCE ON OPERATION OF FISHER HOUSES

Federal Regulations on Fisher Houses and other forms of temporary lodging were published February 24, 2003, in the Federal Register. The Federal Regulations and this Handbook provide guidance on the operation of Fisher Houses and criteria for their use.

## 11. APPLICATION PROCESS

The Fisher House Foundation has committed to constructing one new VA Fisher House each year. Periodically, VHA solicits applications from VHA facilities, through VISN offices, for new VA Fisher Houses. VHA reviews all applications received, applying selection criteria to prioritize applications. VHA then provides the recommendations of the applications best meeting the selection criteria to the Fisher House Foundation for new VA Fisher Houses.

### a. Application Process

(1) To apply for a VHA Fisher House, the VHA facility must complete the attached application (see App. A) and send it through the respective VISN Office to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N).

(2) When available, all applications for VA Fisher Houses need to include:

(a) Letters of endorsement from veterans' service organizations and facility Chief of Voluntary Service.

(b) Letters of endorsement from community leaders and State and Federal politicians.

### b. Selection Process

(1) The Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) and the Office of Patient Care Services (11) conduct a joint review of Fisher House applications, applying the selection criteria described. A list of recommended sites is provided to the Under Secretary of Health for concurrence and forwarded to the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs for approval. Upon the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs' approval, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) provides the list of recommended sites to the Fisher Foundation. *NOTE: The final decision on sites for new VA Fisher Houses rests with the Fisher House Foundation.*

(2) When a facility is selected by the Fisher House Foundation for a new Fisher House, the Foundation confirms its interest in building a Fisher House to the VHA Fisher House Program Coordinator (110B) and the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N). The Fisher House Foundation must provide an anticipated time schedule for the construction project. The VA Fisher House Program Coordinator notifies the facility and request identification of a VISN or facility coordinator to serve as the point of contact for development of the project. The VISN or facility coordinator provides routine updates to 10N through the VA Fisher House Program Coordinator describing progress and/or issues for the project. Near completion of the project, the VISN or facility coordinator notifies the VHA Fisher House Program Coordinator of the projected completion date and of the proposed dedication ceremony

plans. **NOTE:** *The selection and coordination of dedication ceremony participants is addressed by the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N), through the VHA Fisher House Program Coordinator.*

## **12. REFERENCES**

- a. Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-419).
- b. Title 38 U.S.C. 501, and 1708.

**VA FORM 10-0408, VHA FISHER HOUSE APPLICATION**

Below is an embedded copy of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-0408. This form can also be found on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Forms <http://www.va.gov/vaforms> or at <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms>. This is to be used for local reproduction. Since this is a low use form, it will not be stocked by the Hines Service and Distribution Center (formerly known as the Forms and Publications Depot).

Use Adobe Acrobat 5.05 or later to view this form. To print this form, the printer must be set to “print as image” and “fit to page.”



10-0408.pdf